I'd like to address the first question which was how does the availability or lack of access to advance services in rural communities affect economic development? And if I have time I'll talk about the fourth question a little bit, which is the future of advanced services in rural Alaska.

Just a couple of preliminaries. Advanced services, what that is partly depends on your perspective and where you are. If you're sitting in Anchorage or in Washington D.C. it's broadband access or ISDN at least or T-1 or recorded T or something even more than that.

If you're in rural Alaska advance services could be a clean connection to the internet or in some cases even having a phone whether it's land line or wire line so that's -- some of the stories -- some of the examples I'll give relate just to the fact of having a phone in rural Alaska, but I think the analogy will carry forward.

Secondly, thoughts on economic development, it's my own view that economic development must start from the local citizenry, the local residents and it must be something that starts from the bottom up. And the stories I'm going to tell are about people like that, rather than government programs and government involvement.

I found out about an hour ago I was going to talk and I thought I'd talk about some friends of mine down in Homer who run a thing called Jakolof Bay Ferry Service. This is Tom

Hopkins and Marsha Million. And about five or 10 years ago Tom Hopkins, who was a mate on the Alaska Ferry System had a very good job, retired from the ferry system, drew all his money out and decided he was going to go into business for himself as a true Alaskan with a little, small, wooden boat ferrying people around Kachemak Bay in Homer and didn't have much money after they bought the boat. Like everybody that owns a boat would know, and so they couldn't advertise very much. And things really started pretty slow and the key to their success has been telecommunications.

First, it was -- originally when Tom was in the boat the only way to get to him was by marine radio which is very difficult to get to. And maybe he had an answering machine at this home and when he came home either the answering machine was overflowed or it hadn't worked or he'd call somebody back and he couldn't get them, so it wasn't a very efficient way to run a ferry service.

Well, what happened was eventually Tom got internet connectivity on a wireless system that goes to his home across the bay from Homer in Jakolof Bay. And those of you who know -- well, all of you know where Jakolof Bay, so there's no land line service there. What he had was called a Better's (ph) wireless telecommunication system and it was not always very good, but it's good enough to have internet connectivity.

So he put a web site up about his Jakolof Bay ferry

service and he gets now during the season dozen of hits every day from people all over the world trying to decide what they can do when they go to Homer besides fish and it's increased his business by quite a bit. Again, it's not an advanced service. It's fairly low bandwidth, but it's the type of thing that makes development happen.

The other thing that Tom and Marsha did was to obtain cellular phones which they now carry on their boats, so instead of having to try and find someone with a CB radio if you want to talk to them and hope that Tom and Marsha's boat is in a place where you can contact them on CB and you're going to get through, now you can call them on the cell phone. And you can say, well, Tom, I'm going to be an hour late getting out to pick up, can you come an hour later, or it looks kind of rough out here, maybe you shouldn't pick me up today and they answer you. And all of a sudden it's much more efficient dispatch of this boat throughout Kachemak Bay.

And what's happened is they've gone from two boats now to four boats, doubled capacity and more, and now they have lots of competitors as well. So the next step will be, I think, for Tom and Marsha not just the internet access or the very low bandwidth of the cell phone, but a site where you can hear the sound of the boat as it goes through the water and hear the sea otters barking at you and feel -- and maybe even feel the boat rocking, I don't know, but you have to move.

As people get more intense and more sophisticated the people in rural Alaska have to respond. It's not enough just to have a post card or a piece of paper or a simple internet site, but something that's multi-media that will show that we're as good as anybody else any place in the country.

I had about 10 examples, but I think I've used most of my time so I'll stop there for the time being, but I think just a few concluding comments for about 30 seconds. Certainly we live in an information age and the key to the information age is that Alaska -- people can live in Alaska and work any place. We all read about telecommuting and telepoeting (ph).

We all know about the mythical Microsoft program in Sutton or someplace out there who wants way more bandwidth out than he can get, well, all this can happen. And if we want to move Alaska from being an extractive economy to an information age economy and a true center of global trade and connectivity, there's no reason telecommunications can't do that. Thank you.

LT. GOV. ULMER: Thanks again, Don. Our final panelist this afternoon is Marvin Yoder. Marvin is the city manager at the Municipality of Galena, used to be a city manager down in Southeast. He's certainly lived in many different parts of Alaska. Mr. Yoder recently helped Galena win $186,000 U.S.D.A. grant for telehealth and distance learning, so Marvin, tell us what you've been doing.

MR. YODER: First of all, I listened to everyone throw out

all these acronyms and I'm reminded of an incident with my daughter, who was two, when I was out in the yard working and I had about a 10 foot stepladder up. I went into the house for something and came back out and she was halfway up there and as soon as she saw me coming she kind of looked at me and realized where she was and says, what am I doing up here?

I was one of those people that went to high school back in the '50s and never heard much about any of this and then had one experience in college at Oregon State where we had a computer about half the size of this room to do a simple math problem. And so then we fast forward to Galena 1996 and a lot of different things are happening.

Galena started getting connected inside the community, ended up with computer labs in both -- in all the grade schools, junior high, high school and the charter school. Got connected to the web and they decided that the students needed to continue on learning that at home, and so they connected through the students at home. Each student has a home computer and also connected to the web from home. And so the entire community is really wired and everyone has access to the internet however they wish and it's a lot of people getting on.

Also at the same time they decided they needed some of that community know-how inside so they started training kids, high school students, and we now have high school students who are compact certified there and can do warranty work on compact

computers. We also have one student in high school in Galena this last year that passed the Microsoft A certification so, therefore, we think we have the capability inside our community to keep going to. Whatever is ahead, we'll do it.

That's been kind of Galena's motto. We call ourselves innovative. People call us other things, but we are one of those places that believe we can do things and we're not held back that much.

In addition to this telemedicine grant then we are trying to figure out how to overcome some of the problems. One of the things is when you have a community that had about 200 telephones and suddenly you jump up to where you have more than that in modems and connections, the pipeline gets a little small. And Interior Telephone is our provider out there and they've worked hard to keep up with what's going on, but the original hookup was, I think, about 28 and they went to 33, and yet there are times when that gets pretty tight when you have a whole bunch of people getting on at once.

I had an experience just, I think, about two weeks ago where I opened up and found out I had 11 e-mail messages and all of a sudden it got stuck on one for a long time and I started trying to see what was going on. I ended up getting about 400,000 bits of information in 45 minutes. It just depends how many people are on at the time. There's some times you click on and nothing, you can't get on or you get kicked

off. I've had people tell me they wait till midnight to try to get on because there's just so many other people on it. And so one of the things we realize we need to do is to figure out how to get that -- over that one little hump.

We do have a proposal out right now, requests for proposals from some companies to help us overcome that. We feel that if we're going to do the telemedicine, distance learning program as we said, we don't know if we're going to go with fiber optic or satellite or what we're going to do. We're just getting proposals on that and eventually we're going to get that. Within the next year we expect to have that problem solved, but we do want to be able to reach out at those higher speeds and figure out what we're going to do.

The school district did put up a satellite and is not really totally connected yet, but one of the examples of persons on their own computer and trying to download something and it kept showing it was going to take over 45 minutes, they went into the one that was connected to the satellite and got it in two minutes. So they felt like that there's some real potential there. It's at 512, but depending on how they split it up.

Economic applications, where we going to be in five years. I've already had people in my office who are doing things in the community that they think have an opportunity for a web site or for some type of a connection. There's equal tourism.

People flying in and rafting down the Nowitna River, the Melozi River, need to contact -- they need to find customers for their service. There's other that are doing pike fishing. One guy especially has been doing real good at pike fishing. Mostly he's been doing word of mouth. He's asking about a web site because of his -- a lot of pike out in the flats and there it's mostly catch and release so it's a renewable resource. And so it's been things like that, that they're looking at.

And so we think that that's kind of the direction we're going. We know we have the people there and when these people talk to me about it, I know they can do it because their kids are in high school and they're learning how to set up web pages and all that. They're going to do it. And we're just looking forward to getting bandwidth up where we can do this in a real efficient manner.

LT. GOV. ULMER: Great, thank you very much. And thanks to all of our panelists. Commissioner, do you have any questions?

COMMISSIONER NESS: No, but I like a lot of the visions that you've been talking about.

LT. GOV. ULMER: Commissioner?

CHAIR THOMPSON: I do. We heard this morning from programs that deliver education and health care services and those are programs that are presented funded through different federal programs. What examples do you have of economic

development? What I'm wondering is, you know, how soon is it going to be before some of the businesses that -- like the one Mr. May gave us of an example of, are going to be able to help support the network or offer some support for the network?

MR. DAVIS: May I comment?

LT. GOV. ULMER: Go ahead.

MR. DAVIS: Well, WAVE is right now ready to do internet kiosks. WAVE has stores in a lot of villages in the Calista region all the way up to Selawik so it's outside of the Calista region. And what's hampering everything is availability for internet. And WAVE is not at all untypical of what can happen out there. There are people out there that want to sell jewelry or art work right now.

Five years ago an old man called me from Selawik wanted to put up a web site for fish hosting, for taking people out fishing. He has a guiding license. He has a business. He wants to promote it to Europe, and this was five years ago. And since then he's bought a bigger boat.

LT. GOV. ULMER: Any of the other panelists wish.....

MR. YODER: I'd just say that right now besides the one going though the school, there is interconnectivity through Interior Telephone at a flat fee per month and you can get on the internet that way. So there are already people in Galena who are paying their way on that without going through any (indiscernible- voice lowers).....

CHAIR THOMPSON: Mr. Yoder, we heard Mr. Harris talk about the decrease of folks in the village, the exodus, because they don't have the jobs. Do you think, based on what you've done in the community of Galena, you're going to be able to keep some of your people there?

MR. YODER: Right now we're probably in a growing mode. I'm not sure exactly how long that can continue. There is limited availability for jobs, for long-term jobs. Again, you get to the thing of do you have increasing jobs outside of government and the answer is very few.

CHAIR THOMPSON: Uh-hum.

MR. YODER: Government is the big employer. And so -- but yes, there are things settling in.

Whether or not -- if you look at it regionally, I'm not sure, because regionally what you find is that some of the people are moving into Galena because there's more jobs there right now so they might come in from one of the other villages, and so you look at it on a regional basis and it's probably pretty similar to what he's talking about.

LT. GOV. ULMER: Tom?

MR. HARRIS: The key is access to market. And there are wonderful resources that Alaska has, but one of the Korean trade representatives told me that if you can't get to market you can't sell access to that resource.

Right at this moment in time approximately 65 percent of

all the guides in the state live outside the state as their primary residence. These are the big game guides. And I've just come back from the Safari Club annual meeting and it's a huge industry, but it's an industry at this moment in time that because the rural Alaskan that lives in the community does not have access to. It's very challenging.

We just finished the Sportsmen Show here and it's wonderful to see so many dot coms in there, but there were still -- those who were actually from the villages, very few of them had dot coms, so their access to that market and being able to meet that need and save that revenue for the community is severely handicapped.

So we're hoping that -- our organization, one of the things we're doing when we invest in our new network is to build in the capacity to host some web sites for the members who can't host their own and that way try to find a way to get them to market. The cost per entry or our cost of getting to that market as a result of that network has dropped by 90 percent and it's a direct saving onto our members.

LT. GOV. ULMER: Might just follow up just real briefly on your point about the key being access to markets and I just make this comment briefly for our visitors to Alaska. I know people who live on the East Coast tend to think of Alaska as way out there at the end of the line, so to speak, and I just want to give you a different perspective.

Alaska is really at the center of everything. We've equal distance to Japan, to Europe and to the East Coast. We're in the middle of that, and so that has really created a strategic location advantage for Alaska that allows us in terms of our transportation and our trans-shipment a strategic advantage that people didn't think about before. Well, FedEx and others have now figured it out. And if you go out to the airport you'll see a huge complex of air cargo.

The Anchorage International Airport has become the center of the hub, not way out there. So our access to market, our ability to be a place which companies see, at least Anchorage and by extension the rest of Alaska, is very close to Anchorage really. We are really in an amazing position to be able to link up our transportation location advantage with our telecommunications.

And, of course, because of the fiber optic out of -- really I've forgotten what the numbers are, someone here can probably tell us that during the public testimony, but we have really more fiber out of Anchorage to the Lower 48 than the East Coast has to Europe. It's really quite remarkable. We have a lot of bandwidth.

So you kind of start to put all those things together, you get some wonderful economic development opportunities for the state of Alaska. And although today we are focusing largely on some of the inadequacies, the glass being half full instead of

-- or half empty instead of half full from the perspective of rural Alaska. If we can improve that link Alaska as a whole becomes a tremendous place for opportunity in this 21st century information -- linking the information technology with the transportation and location advantage. Yes.

MR. DAVIS: I'll make it brief. In reference -- we're here for the economic side, but in terms of, like, the people leaving Galena or village population or whatever, having the internet access is going to help the youth stay off of drugs. It's going to help the suicide rate. It's going to help the quality of living. Any which way you look at it, it's going to help rural Alaska. And that's going to pay off economically in health care, in education, in whatever you want to name, it's going to pay off. It's going to nothing but good for rural Alaska.

LT. GOV. ULMER: Okay. Nan, did you have anything?

CHAIR THOMPSON: No.

MR. RHYNER: If I might be able to respond to.....

LT. GOV. ULMER: Sure, go ahead.

MR. RHYNER: .....Commissioner Thompson? The one resource that many of these small villages have in abundance is human resource. And what we have with the deployment of advanced services is the opportunity to provide both the chicken and egg at the same time. It'll give us the opportuni- -- or the ability to provide the educational tools to these communities

and then give them access back to the world wide market. And what we can do with those human resources is develop like service bureaus out there, do things like the school's doing in Galena, train these people to be web masters and set up E commerce sites, those kind of things which will really take advantage of the human resource.

LT. GOV. ULMER: Kathy, do you have any questions or comments?

MS. BROWN: Yeah, I just want to try and be clear when I leave that I understand. I heard some folks say that the last mile's the best mile in Alaska, so that's interesting to me and I just wonder if you all think that's true? In other words, is the local distribution system there and really ready for DSL, for instance? Is there fixed wireless, are there wireless carriers who are taking care of the short haul, but that the problem is transport and long haul and that we heard this morning that that was the problem. First, is that true?

And then secondly, I've heard a lot about sort of the -- the discussion goes two ways. One, let's have a monopoly whether it be a government monopoly or a commercial monopoly because, after all, we have to aggregate these services and there's just not enough people to have more than one provider. I heard that.

On the other hand I heard, no, no, no, let's not do that because we know that competitive pressures are what's going to

bring prices down in choice of service. And I need to get a sense from you all who are doing economic development how you see that landscape?

MR. RHYNER: Well, coming from the LEC side, I guess I'll answer the first part of your question. And, again, as Mr. Fauske said, most of these remote villages, the ones that are primarily utilizing the satellite connections and are not on the wired network that you were talking about, are generally very compact. And there just isn't an issue with deploying DSL out there.

In fact, we've priced it out and we're in the process of Beta testing both DSL and cable modems in these smaller communities. We can deploy DSL in a small community like this for the first 24 customers for around $50,000. I don't believe there's a wireless option out there that you can deploy for those kind of dollars, so it's there. It exists. We can do it.

The issue is how you get -- it's the transport of the broadband out to the community that's the real issue.

MS. BROWN: Well, it sounds like it's the transport back to Anchorage or to some other point, but not to the community, is that right? So here you have your ability to network that community, but you need to get back to the point of presence, say, of the internet provider,.....

MR. RHYNER: Exactly.

MS. BROWN: .....is that right?
MR. RHYNER: Yeah, either to Fairbanks, Anchorage or Juneau. You have to get there so you can connect with the terrestrial facility.
MS. BROWN: So let me ask you about this part, should that be competitive? Is it -- should it be provided by one provider or multiple providers? What's going to bring the best kind of thing to Alaska?
MR. RHYNER: Well, as I said in my opening remarks, I think it needs to be a shared network. I think we could do that through shared ownership, but I think it needs to be a single network where everybody is concentrating on making it work and making it the most efficient network we can make it.
MS. BROWN: Are there any -- is there anyone else who thinks differently than that?
MR. HARRIS: I'd have to say that, you know, the old RCA network was a monopoly but it was the best thing since sliced bread for those communities. It opened up communication and resources.
It hasn't been that long ago, in fact, '91 the last time I was living in the rural community, but you really saw the impact of not having services. I saw government checks that were charged check cashing fees of 35 percent simply because they could not access money, could not -- and the ATMs that have gone out there have done an enormous -- there needs to be

more of them out there. But in some form of cash. And rural Alaska does pay the bill without those services sooner or later.

LT. GOV. ULMER: Any other panelists care to comment on that discussion? I suspect that there are probably a few people in the audience that may also want to answer your question, Kathy, under public testimony. Any other comments or questions?

MS. BROWN: Thank you.

LT. GOV. ULMER: Thank you very much to our economic development panel, a very important part of Alaska's utilization of this technology.

The final portion of our day is a public comment period. I think I will go ahead and roll right into that without taking another break. At this point we only have four or five people who have signed up who actually wish to testify. We would like to make certain that anyone who is here today has that opportunity. Is there another sign-up sheet somewhere, Paula, or just in case somebody changes their mind and decides that they want to.....

If you'll just give Paula your name if you decide that you want to testify even though you haven't signed up to do so.

All right. Let's see, Ernie Baumgartner from McGrath Light & Power. Are you still with us? Yes. I hate to ask people to come to the microphone, but that's the only way we

can record your comments. Thank you very much. I hope that's not too intimidating. We're real friendly.....

MR. BAUMGARTNER: No, that's fine.

LT. GOV. ULMER: .....folks, so don't worry about the mic.

MR. BAUMGARTNER: Okay. My name is Ernie Baumgartner. I'm from McGrath. And to my (sic) employer McGrath Light & Power which is a subsidiary of MTNT which is a Native Corporation in that region. It's for four village communities, McGrath, Takotna, Nikolai, Telida, which is where MTNT come from.

The issues that you've been addressing here today are ones that were very important to us. A year ago I was a total baby in this whole area. My use of the internet was to get on CompuServe and go after my e-mail by dialing a long distance number, then go and have dinner, come back, hopefully my e-mails were in.

It's hard to run a business that way. It's very hard. And so, consequently, we got to looking at and give it some thought, I wonder if we can create our own ISP. And in so doing and in going through the process of this I was listening to the testimony and the problems and so forth I see, I think a lot of the questions that were voiced we found at least portions of the answers, not all of them and maybe not even the best answers, but at least some.

One is that you talk about bandwidth. Bandwidth is an

expensive commodity. We look up in space and you see the air and you think it's unlimited, but there's only a certain ring that you can put stationary satellites in. So, consequently, at a 2 degree beam width there's only a finite number that you can stick up there, but we all know that.

Well, what we've done is that we've built an infrastructure that has your major hubs like Anchorage, Seattle, Fairbanks, that's put up individual pipes to every receiver. And so for a community like McGrath we may have a dozen federal agencies in there, maybe three or four state agencies, the schools and so forth, and everybody has their own dedicated pipe right back to Anchorage or wherever they're going. If, on the other hand, we put the traffic shapers (ph) on the McGrath end at the earth station, then we can share that bandwidth going back and eliminate some of the waste on the bandwidth.

When you think about it, an office worker on a computer that's connected on a dedicated line is usually not using more than what, 30 minutes of transmission time a day. And that's if they're a busy person, yet you're paying for that bandwidth for 24 hours. So instead of having your network break out in Anchorage we need to devise ways of traffic shaping on the local end.

Now we did that in McGrath with the internet. We put an ISP in at McGrath. We did that because one, we knew that

bandwidth was going to be expensive. And if we could give people a local access point and then we only use bandwidth when we're trying to pass data back and forth, then we could buy a much smaller segment of that bandwidth and give fast speed to our customers.

In so doing we've also gone ahead and introduced wireless land. And we using an 11 megabyte spread spectrum wireless out there. This system is about as fast as your PC. You click, it's there. The -- you go to get e-mail, when I go back home I'll probably have oh, 50, 60 e-mails. It will take less than one second to pull them in. Just bing, it's there. This is in a rural community of 430 people.

We have Dial-Up access because the wireless infrastructure is expensive. The -- when we first started putting it in it was about $1,000 per customer. It's down about $100 right now. So most people couldn't afford it so they wanted Dial-Up, so we put in 336 with modems, and you know, hooked up those that couldn't afford the wireless that way. Well, they're only 336 to the server which means they get their e-mail just like that. If they're browsing we have a cash set-up in there so that most of their stuff if they've ever been on that side before, they go with just upbasing information. It doesn't have to pass all that information through those pipes. So, consequently, our customers are getting a high quality of service.

You know, I pulled in your web page on Thursday when I

heard about this. It took four seconds to get it from Washington and download the whole thing the first time. Then I waited a little bit and went in and, of course, it was on my proxy and I hit and it was there. I went to the State of Alaska, which has a lot of graphics, a very beautiful home page. That took me 20 seconds to bring it in the first time, but after that it was there within about two or three.

So the point, again, is that the quality of what we have produced out there is very good. Certainly up to standards with anything in the city. It cost us about $70,000 to put that in. That is over twice what it should have, but we didn't know what we were doing so we were buying things we didn't need and having to do things twice and three times.

The -- we've learned enough now that we can put this in a location for, like I say, less than half. I think I estimated to the board $30,000. The thing is that you have to have it -- local expertise. So I looked around in McGrath and I found a 14 year old boy, and I said how would you like to have a part-time job for 8 bucks an hour. And he said, cool. So last summer I took him over to Matnet in the valley here and I got with a guy there, Tom Arnold, and I said can you teach him how to use Lennox. And he said, sure. So for three days he sat with him.

Then he went home and I bought him a computer, a $350 special right off the bottom shelf there and set him up. A

month later he came to me and said I broke my computer. I said, what did you do? He said, I don't know, I destroyed the bios. So I said well, we don't want to do that too often. He said okay, so I bought him another computer, so I spent $350 plus his three days there. And when we put the internet in in September he was ready to go. Now he's running that thing. He's administering that.

The problem with 14 year olds they grow up. One neat thing about people is we keep creating new 14 year olds. So the supply won't run out.

The thing that I've noticed that I want to impress also is not that this can't be done. When we started talking to the community about it I created a list and on one side I put what are the problems and what are going to be the obstacles to overcome in creating an internet. We filled up a whole sheet, you know, those big, what do you call them -- well, just a big sheet of paper. We filled that whole thing up with all kinds of reasons. Then we said well, what can we do? And we only had three different ideas on it. One of them was well, we can look at see what it costs. So I went back to my office and took the sheet with all the things we were the problems, just wadded it up and threw it in the garbage, and we started on the three items that were on the left side. And that's the way we moved forward on this.

The community as a whole was real sluggish to respond.

Part of the reason is that they were getting some promise of free internet service through the school. Of course, we realized that that wasn't going to be commercially available, so we were forced economically to look into this other venture too, and go ahead. But because of the interest of it commercially, in other words, looking at it for our business, and when I say that I'm talking about for the whole community, we focused real hard in delivering all the aspects necessary for success.

We worked with the university to create classes to teach people how to use the internet. We created more skill in our people for working on problems. And when we first started there people didn't know even what a browser was much less, you know, how to really use one effectively. Most machines were old, didn't have the capabilities of even putting on IE-5 or anything like that. So it was a process really of with each person we turned on having to spend time with them, teach them and so forth and so on. We worked with the community, university and school. Eventually you see that excitement building.

The next step that we're going forward with now is when I get back there's going to be a meeting with the business leaders to create a vision of growth for the community and how we can move forward. And one of the first items on that agenda is tourism because we don't have much other than people and

black spruce for natural resources there. So anyway, it's a move forward.

And there were a lot of problems that were brought up, but most of them were not that difficult to solve. So if there's ways that the -- you asked should the -- you know, this thing be regulated or -- excuse me, monopolized or not, in most small communities there's not two of anything. You know, I've seen grocery stores try to start up, and usually it doesn't work. The small community can only handle one. On the other hand, if you block competition then it tends to stagnate things, so I don't know what the answer is.

It's one that has to be looked pretty hard at, but I definitely think that anything we can do to move forward to reducing the long-haul costs because that's what we've all been talking about is going to help. And so the idea of looking at traffic shapers or some devices on the local end to consolidate the data going back is something worth looking at.

Another thing, that even in McGrath we've only been going a little bit on this, I've seen a definite migration from the school system to the commercial system. And the reason is because of the level of service and the quality. It's definitely faster and if there's problems they're fixed right away.

Since we turned up at the end of September we haven't had a single server crash. Our availability has been 99.98 percent

of the time, and those .02 percents were Eagle River earth station issues. So, you know, the quality is there. It can be maintained locally, it's not that we can't do this. We can do it. Thank you.

LT. GOV. ULMER: Great. Ernie, thank you very much for sharing your experience with us, and congratulations on what you've been able to do for your community.

The next person on our list is Steve Hall with ACS. Are you still here, Steve? Okay. Ramya Subramanian, how am I doing on that?

MS. SUBRAMANIAN: You got it.

LT. GOV. ULMER: All right. AKLA.

MS. SUBRAMANIAN: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the importance of expanding information technology access to the underserved rural and tribal areas.

My name is Ramya Subramanian, and I'm here today as the current president of the Alaska Library Association, an umbrella organization that represents several libraries, public, state, academic, rural and urban alike.

The democratic principle of equal access to information for all which formed the very foundation of public libraries 200 years ago are even truer today as we enter the age of information technology. Libraries have played a very critical role in enabling residents of distant areas to become literate in the tools of information technology offering classes,